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THE VIETNAM SITUATION: AN ANALYSIS AND ESTIMATE

CONCLUSIONS

A. Despite obvious problems and difficulties, at least some progress has been recorded over the past year in every major component of the struggle in South Vietnam. Progress has been most marked in the evolution of national political institutions and, at least until recently, in the conventional military struggle. There has been less progress in the struggle against the Communists' southern organization. In the economic field, problems remain but inflation has at least been kept within politically acceptable bounds. Progress has been least evident in the pacification field, but even here the net assessment still comes out a shaded plus, and the very intensity of the Communists' current attack on the RD program is testimony to its partial success and their recognition that it poses a fundamental threat to Communist objectives. Little momentum has been built up and little dramatic improvement can be anticipated in the near future -- except possibly in the evolution of national institutions. At the moment, however, the major trends are all favorable.

B. These trends, of course, could easily be reversed. The Communists are endeavoring to regain some measure of strategic military initiative, and their attacks are posing serious obstacles to the pacification effort. The Ky-Thieu rivalry could undo much that has been achieved in the political realm. Nonetheless, the longer-term prospect is not necessarily bleak. Much rides on the events of the next six months. If the Communists are once again militarily frustrated we can anticipate, at a minimum, serious morale problems throughout their southern organization. If the electoral process produces a new government with a reasonable

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mandate, the GVN will be strengthened and its domestic and international image greatly enhanced. The security problems inhibiting pacification progress are rooted in matters of training and attitude -- not inadequate resources or lack of physical ability -- and, hence, at least theoretically subject to amelioration. There is no guarantee that all will go well in these critical areas and the situation could deteriorate markedly over the summer. On the other hand, much has been accomplished in the past two years and further progress in any one of these key areas would produce a significant improvement in the overall situation.

C. North Vietnam is paying a stiff price for its leaders' relentless pursuit of Communist Party objectives, but the price is one the Communist leadership is willing to pay. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that any feasible program of military action against North Vietnam could render Hanoi physically incapable of continuing its support and direction of southern insurgency. This does not mean that a cessation of military action against North Vietnam would improve the prospects for peace, since such a cessation would most likely have exactly the opposite effect. Even a reduction in the present level of punishment now being inflicted on North Vietnam would encourage the Hanoi leadership in its conviction that the US is politically unable to persist in the struggle. Furthermore, if the north were not impelled to pay at least some continuing cost on its own territory, Hanoi would have little reason not to persist forever in its attempt to conquer the south.

D. Hanoi's assessment of the struggle, and hence its basic strategy, is not likely to change unless Communist forces are militarily and politically defeated in the south or unless Hanoi changes its estimate of US determination and comes to believe that present

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Communist strategy will produce a struggle of indefinite duration during which North Vietnam will be forced to pay a continuing price on its own territory.

E. There are compelling reasons why Peking wants the war to go on. To yield at this point would not only mark a defeat for the Chinese line of revolutionary warfare but would enhance Soviet influence. Although the Chinese are probably prepared to broaden their military and economic aid to sustain Hanoi's will and ability to prolong the war in the south, it is doubtful that they are committed to success in South Vietnam at any price. China clearly wants to avoid a major confrontation with the US, although Chinese intervention would be likely in the event of air attacks on Chinese bases, a major invasion of North Vietnam, or a disintegration of authority in Hanoi.

F. Soviet leaders probably believe that there is no prospect of movement toward negotiations for the time being and appear to have concluded that they have no alternative but to help Hanoi to carry on the war until political solution is possible.

G. The longer the war lasts, the more problems the US will have with its international image and world position. A long and intense conflict would heighten fears of a broader war, would be widely deplored, and would bring heavy criticism on the US. If the conflict does not spread, however, and if its outcome encourages the belief that East Asia has been stabilized and Communist expansion blocked, it would be widely recognized that the effort had been justified.

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